

spotlight is going. We know that 80 percent of our schools in America are high-achieving schools, they are making the advanced yearly progress under No Child Left Behind. Five percent more are just missing it, and in the 15 percent, don't we want to ignore this letter from the National Education Association?

I will answer their letter from here. I am not going to vote against the Alexander amendment.

I hope they will write me often. I hope it is not this kind of letter again. I say to my friends from Tennessee who were good enough to travel all the way up here and visit with me, I am going to work a little harder in communicating with them. I know there will be issues upon which we disagree—the Tennessee Education Association and I have proved in the past we can disagree.

What I want to prove to them in the future is there are lots of ways we can agree. I know they are dedicated professionals, they are working hard every day under difficult circumstances—many with children whose parents don't feed them well, don't teach them before they come to school, and don't take care of them in the afternoon. I want to be sensitive to that.

In my remarks today I want to send a clear message to the National Education Association: I am disappointed in their attitude. I hope the Senate rejects their attitude. But I want to be as clear to my friends in the Tennessee Education Association that I greatly appreciate their visit.

I look forward to redoubling my efforts to work with them. I look forward to talking with them over time about support. I encourage their ways to honor their professionals, including development of a compensation program that rewards outstanding teaching and schools.

I ask unanimous consent the letter from the National Education Association be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

FEBRUARY 13, 2007.

Hon. LAMAR ALEXANDER,
U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR ALEXANDER: On behalf of the National Education Association's (NEA) 3.2 million members, we urge your opposition to several ill-conceived amendments to the FY07 Continuing Resolution. Specifically, we urge you to vote NO on:

An amendment to be offered by Senator Alexander (R-TN) that would provide \$99 million for the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF); and

Any amendment that would call for across-the-board cuts to already depleted domestic programs.

Votes associated with these issues may be included in the NEA Legislative Report Card for the 110th Congress.

NEA strongly opposes the Teacher Incentive Fund, which diverts scarce resources from existing underfunded professional development programs. For example, Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education

Act allows use of funds for the stated purposes of the Teacher Incentive Fund and also gives states and school districts significant flexibility to utilize funds for activities that best meet their needs. In contrast, the Teacher Incentive Fund restricts use of funds to only two possible uses—merit pay and tenure reform.

The proposed CR would reduce TIF funding, while increasing funding for programs proven effective in maximizing student achievement. We support the CR as proposed and oppose any effort to increase TIF funding.

NEA also opposes any proposal to reduce funding across-the-board, further stretching limited resources among already struggling domestic programs. Although such amendments may be addressing very worthy goals, we believe they are more appropriately considered as part of bills to be debated later, such as Emergency Supplemental legislation. Therefore, we urge your vote against any such amendment.

We thank you for your consideration of our views on these important issues.

Sincerely,

DIANE SHUST,
*Director of Govern-
ment Relations.*

RANDALL MOODY,
*Manager of Federal
Policy and Politics.*

Mr. ALEXANDER. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CARDIN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, we are in the posture of having to pass an appropriations bill that is to none of our liking because the Congress is not fulfilling its responsibility in the budgeting and the appropriations process. It goes back to the fact that albeit the Senate and the Senate Appropriations Committee were responsible in producing all 13 appropriations bills, the leadership in the last Congress decided they did not want to pass 11 of those 13. To the best of my recollection, it was the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security appropriations bills that were passed, leaving all the others without funding. Each time we have continued emergency stopgap funding. The particular law that is in effect now goes until midnight this Thursday. That is no way to run a railroad. It puts us in the posture of having to take something instead of nothing which would shut down the Government. That is not a logical way to do it.

The entire Federal budgetary process ought to be revamped. In the old days, back in the 1970s, the Budget Act was enacted because it was giving the new tools available for the Congress to discipline itself on spending, to hold down spending. Over 22 years, we have seen the Budget Act become not an economic process but a political process in which budget documents are submitted—for example, the one sub-

mitted by the President, completely unrealistic—so that political goals can say they are going to be achieved; in other words, moving the budget toward balance. The President has pointed that out over a 5-year period. When, in fact, the reality is that a lot of the President's assumptions in his budget he has sent to the Congress are not realistic. In fact, they are fiction.

For example, there is a tax that is called the alternative minimum tax. It was designed years ago so that people with higher incomes that had huge deductions couldn't offset all of their income. They would have to pay some tax. It was designed to go to that higher income group so that they would still pay their fair share. If that alternative minimum tax is not allowed to be applied in the future—and I can't tell you the technicalities—it comes down and it swoops in a great deal of the middle class, which it was never intended to do, middle-income people, with the result that much higher taxes would be paid in the very income levels that the alternative minimum tax was never designed to hit.

Naturally, a Congress in the future is not going to let that happen, for that additional tax to go on the middle class. Yet the President's assumptions in the budget he has sent are that that alternative minimum tax is going to go away and, therefore, the increased revenue is going to be coming into the Federal Government from the middle-income taxpayers. Therefore, it makes it look like his budget deficit is getting smaller and smaller and moving toward balance.

The same thing is true with the tax cuts that were enacted back in 2001. Over the next several years, a number of those tax cuts expire. Those tax cuts that affect the middle class are not going to expire because the Congress is not going to let that happen. If it did, as the President has proposed in his budget, the revenues to the Government are going to be greater and, therefore, the annual deficit is going to be less. But that is not realistic. So what we have is a document of political fiction.

This isn't the first time. This has been going on over the last couple of decades. But when it leads us down the path of fiction, sleight of hand, a head fake on what the budgetary condition of the country is, as the country, indeed, ought to make its staggering steps toward balancing the budget, at least down the line in the next 5 to 7 years, when that is all a political fiction, it undermines confidence. It undermines the entire system. In large part, it leads to where we are today.

We are going to pass what is known as a continuing resolution, which is an end-of-the-day budget that is pared down, that doesn't address priorities as it should. And are the American people served best by this kind of process? No.

This Senator thinks it is time for us to have some major overhaul of the Budget Act. There are a lot of other